

ABSTRACT

The number of IP addresses required by a central office device,  
which is connected to a network segment and a number of customer  
5 internet devices to pass packets between the network segment and the  
customer internet devices, is reduced to one by using an IP address and  
a subnet mask that are associated with the network interface as a  
virtual interface. The subnet mask allows packets to be routed to the  
central office device, which then forwards the packets to the customer  
10 internet devices.